



Blackfoot Church of Christ

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The Autonomy of the Local Church

By Keith Sharp

There was a time all gospel preachers at least gave lip service to the principle of congregational autonomy. For example, Brother Lewis G. Hale, Bible professor at Oklahoma Christian College, wrote over 50 years ago:

We are all in agreement that each local church is separate and independent in organization from all other local churches. All of us are opposed to the destruction of autonomy. (77)

Today, many have quit even giving lip service to the principle of the independence of the local church. In a 1985 publication, Brother Alvin Jennings wrote:

To sum it up, the church, the treasury and elders will be one in the urban area. Elders will allow and encourage assemblies anywhere and everywhere that men gather in the name of Jesus. Congregational autonomy will begin to fade within the city.... (71)

(I understand both Brother Jennings and the International Church of Christ denomination, which began in the 70's as the "Crossroads Movement," metamorphosed to the "Boston" or "Discipling" ministry, then crystallized as the ICOC, have now renounced this view.)

Although the word "autonomy" is not found in the New Testament, the principle of congregational autonomy is plainly taught there. In fact, no principle is more basic to the New Testament pattern for the organization of the church than that of the independence of the local church. The purpose of this lesson is to scripturally explain congregational autonomy, or local control.

The Word “Autonomy” – The term “autonomy” means “The quality or state of being independent, free, and self-directing; individual or group freedom” (Webster. 1:148).

How Applied to Local Church

Does this principle apply to the local congregation? If so, how?

It certainly does not apply to legislative (i.e., law making) power. Christ is the only Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23) and its only Law Giver (James 4:12). No man or group of men may make laws and bind them on Christians as a test of fellowship, whether they act within or without the confines of the local church. Christians must neither draw up nor recognize human creeds or uninspired statements of faith as binding. To do so is to usurp the authority of Christ.

Rather, by “congregational autonomy” I mean that the direction of the execution of the will of Christ belongs completely within the local church and is not to be surrendered, partially or completely, to any outside control. Elders are to be appointed within each local church (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). These elders (also called bishops, i.e., overseers, or pastors, i.e., shepherds - Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-2) have the oversight of the congregation of which they are members (1 Peter 5:1-2). There they rule under the authority of Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4). No passage of Scripture broadens their authority. The elders of the local church have no right to oversee anything other than the work of the local church where they are members. There is no authority for a congregation to allow any man, group of men, or organization outside the local church to oversee all or any part of its function.

This principle applies to every facet of the work of the congregation. Each local church selects its own leaders (Acts 6:1-6), governs itself within the limits of those things Christ has authorized (1 Peter 5:1-4; Colossians 3:17), determines its own program of work and selects the arrangements to carry it out (cf. Acts 11:22; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25), controls the use of its own resources (Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8), and disciplines its own sinful members (1 Corinthians chapter 5).

I believe Brother Lewis Hale well summarized the scriptural principle of congregational autonomy:

Church autonomy includes and requires that the local church, under Christ (1) control its own resources, (2) exercise the oversight of its own work, (3) manage its own affairs, (4) discipline its own disorderly members, (5) provide for its own worthy indigent to the limit of its ability, and (6) governs itself in all matters of judgment and expediency. (Ibid)

Will A Man Rob God?

By Burl Young

In the book of Malachi chapter three, verse eight we read, Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. To understand the context of this verse we would need to go back and understand they were not giving to God as they were told, and all in all defrauding him. Today, I believe it is possible to rob God in similar ways. Today's article will be about that very thing; robbing God.

We May Rob God By Stealing Time From Him:

There are now and always have been 24 hours in the day and the same amount of days in the year etc. However many make the excuse they can't attend church services because _____ (fill in the blank). This excuse reminds me of the old story about the man who wanted to borrow his neighbor's axe. His neighbor told him he was sorry, but he intended to cut butter with his axe, to which the man replied, "You don't cut butter with an axe!" His reply, "No, I don't really cut butter with an axe, but you're not going to borrow it and one excuse is as good as another".

We May Rob God By Stealing Money From Him:

Did you realize when you fail to give as prospered on the first day of the week, you are robbing God? An excuse is often made that "the local church has plenty of money in the treasury and doesn't need my money". This is not true, because you are giving to the LORD AND NOT JUST THE LOCAL CHURCH. Remember when you fail to give God is short-changed in the process because he has commanded you to give as prospered. Although the end result is the same, you must remember your obligation to give is based on your ability and opportunity and I promise you there is always a need as most of the world is lost and needs to hear the gospel of Christ.

Prayer Requests & Announcements

- Ray recovering from hip replacement surgery and Ginger is sick also.
- Ray & Ginger, as Ray deals with Alzheimer's Symptoms
- Larry, Leukemia Diagnosis
- Ross, Debbie, and Rachel are in Des Moines. Ross has been preaching there this weekend; They will be traveling back to Idaho this week.
- Scott Boucher (Sparks NV) continues in Hospice Care
- Keep April in your prayers as she deals with health issues
- The Christians in the Philippines

Preaching Schedule for June

June 28 - Ben Palmer

Class Ben Palmer

Worship Assignments

Today

Song Leader – Ben Palmer

Lord's Table – Tom Mitchell

Wednesday

Song Leader – Tom Mitchell

Invitation – Ben Palmer

Blackfoot Church of Christ
370 North Shilling Ave.
Blackfoot, Idaho 83221

Meeting Times:

Sunday Morning Classes 10:00AM
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00AM
Wednesday Evening 7:30PM



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